

**City of Eau Claire
Plan Commission Minutes
Meeting of March 20, 2017**

City Hall, Council Chambers

7:00 p.m.

Members Present: Messrs. Brenholt, Pederson, Radabaugh, Seymour, Weld
Ms. Ebert and Ms. Mitchell

Staff Present: Messrs. Tufte, Noel, Hoffer and Sanderson

The meeting was chaired by Mr. Weld.

1. CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION – Eric Larsen

Mr. Weld presented Mr. Larsen with a certificate of appreciation for his service on the Commission.

Mr. Larsen stated it was his pleasure to serve. He encouraged members that cities have a legal right to plan land uses in order to protect the general safety and welfare of citizens and to promote a positive quality of life.

2. DISCUSSION/DIRECTION

A. Eau Claire Housing Ordinance Revision

Doug Hoffer, Assistant City Attorney presented changes to the Housing Maintenance Code, 16.08. Revisions are State Act 176 compliant and aligned closely with building codes. He stated the 2015 Comprehensive Plan has policy statements to consider such a program and it was the number one recommendation out of the subsequent Neighborhood Revitalization Task Force.

Shane Sanderson, Director of Environmental Health at the City-County Eau Claire Health Department stated there is a clear link that housing is a social determinate of health. For example, poor sanitary conditions can equal communicable disease. Lead paint is still a legacy issue in the community and can affect brain development in young children. The changes are meant to provide a minimum standard or 'solid floor' for all people to have safe housing.

Mr. Hoffer explained the major feature is adding a rental registration and inspection program with a nominal annual fee per property owner. The program would be criteria-based, with inspections being prioritized depending on a formula of factoring housing defects, confirmed complaints, age of structure (over 40 years), number of rental units, and cases of retaliation. It would apply to rentals but also to rooming houses and owner-occupied homes if there are problems. Fees proposed would be around an initial inspection fee of \$90 and a re-inspection fee of \$125. Fees may be waived if no violations are found or corrected in advance. The program is meant to promote proactive compliance and incentivize good housing condition, rather than be punitive. This approach was based on census after holding listening sessions and input meetings with stakeholders like the Chippewa Valley Apartment Association, Realtors Association, UWEC, neighborhood associations and others.

Mr. Sanderson stated since the 1980s the Health Department has utilized a compliant-driven process called the Intensified Housing Code Compliance program. It was created in response to neighborhood associations' concerns with deteriorated housing. It also has a feature to be proactive using windshield survey in the poorer neighborhoods. Since it started, over 4,000 properties have been brought up to compliance. However, over time as the housing stock continues to get older, there is approximately a 10 to 12 percent increase in defects, as found in comparing 2010 versus 2015 numbers. The program rates housing on number of outward defects which in turns helps to prioritize the most urgent needs. He noted working on those that scored 15s down to the 7s often means neglecting the lesser scored properties. Then, by that time it is time to do the survey over again. The new rental registration program should help on addressing more of these neglected units. He estimated in 2014 there were about 12,600 rental units on 7,700 properties.

Commissioners had several questions and suggestions. In terms of collecting ever-changing names for owners of rental units, they stated the County Register of Deeds, City and County assessment data and title companies may be good sources to partner with. They also stressed communication and education will be important getting people aware of the new program and participating. They thought the public and investors will benefit so as to know more fully which are the problem properties and good performers.

Mr. Sanderson stated that City Council will consider the ordinance in April. After that staff will begin to design the various elements of the program from the databases to web presence. The program will not start until January 2018 so all stakeholders have time to adjust.

B. Code Compliance Items

None.

C. Future Agenda Items


None.

D. Additions or Corrections to Minutes

None.

3. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of March 6, 2017 were approved.



Jamie Radabaugh, Secretary